

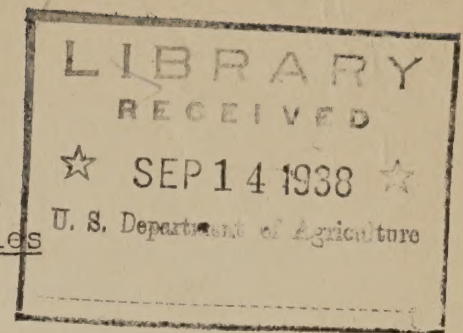
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Preparing Students For Home Management
Consultation With Low-Income Rural Families

by

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(A paper presented before the Social Welfare and Public
Health Section at the annual meeting of the A.H.E.A.)



In discussing the assigned topic no attempt will be made to set up a curriculum to be followed by Home Economics students planning to work with low-income farm families, but rather to set up some of the problems to be met, type of information needed, and activities frequently engaged in, which may be used as a basis for determining desirable abilities, qualifications and training necessary for success in the field.

At the present time home economists are working with low-income farm families through such organizations or agencies as Relief, Mother's Allowance, Public Health Organizations, Extension Service, Vocational Education, Farm Security Administration and thru private and public loaning agencies. While each of these organizations aim to perform a somewhat different service in the community, might it not be safe to say that the ultimate objective of most services is somewhat similar in that all are desirous of aiding the farm family to get in a position where it can better help itself to solve the problem at hand? The job of family building referred to in a recent article by Edward C. Lindeman is the one faced by these workers. It is not an easy job, but it is a challenging one!

For the purpose of this discussion we will consider the term, "low-income farm family" as referring to a member of that group of farm families who are having a difficult time producing an income of sufficient size to meet necessary farm operating expenses and obligations, provide for minimum and necessary living expenses and who are requesting or needing help of some type from a rural service agency, such as a loan, a grant, medical or health attention, farm or home management information, as an aid in their upward climb to financial independence. Only as assistance of some type is requested or needed, is the home economist called into consultation on the solution of home management problems.

It might be said that the home economist working with farm families has a double job -- for while she must understand and be able to work with practical rural home management problems, she should also have a practical understanding and appreciation of the factors influencing successful farm management, if she is to understand the problems involved in obtaining the farm income and the factors controlling its use.

She must recognize the fact that farming is often considered a business of low profits and that there are many factors which may combine to affect the success of the farm family enterprise, such as:

1. Poor land
2. Unwise use of land
3. Too little land, livestock and equipment to insure an economic unit
4. Lack of managerial ability
5. Insecurity of tenure
6. Lack of, or inadequate credit
7. Burdensome debts
8. Low prices for products and inflated land values
9. Lack of marketing facilities
10. Poor weather conditions
11. Inadequate housing and equipment
12. Poor health and sanitation
13. Lack of family cooperation and understanding
14. Educational limitations and opportunities
15. Lack of opportunities or inability to use community and leisure activities.

Not only must she recognize these factors as points to be dealt with in her work with the family, but she must be able to see their implications, their inter-relation and their relation to the problem at hand.

The home economist should have a good picture of the local rural situation within the state and county or area in which she is working. This picture should include such facts as (1) Total number of farms (2) The number of owners and rents (3) Leasing terms (4) The number of owned farms which are mortgaged and the number of or expected foreclosures (5) The number of farm families having loans from various governmental and private agencies and the purposes for which these loans were made (6) The number of farm families receiving some sort of assistance as grants or relief, old age assistance, mother's allowance, etc. (7) Average farm incomes (8) Main sources of farm incomes (9) Location and type of services available to rural families (10) Location of county agents and home demonstration agents (11) Credit agencies available to and used by local farm families (12) Purposes for which families borrow money, etc.

Knowledge of the factors which may influence the family's success and a picture of the local situation, provides but a background for actual consultation with families. The real test comes in the success with which a worker can approach the family, learn of their problems, analyze them and help in their solution. Knowing how far she should go. The best techniques to be used in development of the individual and how to measure the family's progress are far more difficult than to develop an understanding and appreciation of the previously discussed points.

The successful home economist who works with low-income farm families, no matter what organization she represents, realizes that there are certain steps through which the family must proceed if it is to grow. One of the

marks of such a worker is the number of families she has helped to develop to a point where they can meet and solve successfully their own problems with little or no further assistance from her. She differentiates between "doing for the family" and getting the family to desire to and actually do for themselves. This type of worker develops her plan of work on the supposition that if the family is to become independently able to provide for the necessary items of farm operating, debt repayment and family living, the family members must develop ability: to wisely use available resources; to form sound judgments; to apply information; and know where to seek the help needed. To do this she plans to:

1. Help the family look back and determine why they are in their present situation.
2. Help them make a plan to get from where they are to where they wish to go.
3. Provide helps, stimulation and guidance necessary in the successful execution of the plan.
4. Help them to evaluate the success or failure of the plan and to analyze factors causing either.
5. Direct in the setting up of a new goal and a new plan in light of past experience.

In actual operation these steps are not as clear cut and separate as they would appear to be, for frequently it is only during the development of the family's plan that experiences and information on present and past living habits are obtained, and frequently it is necessary to provide some practical help before sufficient confidence is developed to actually learn of some of the past events which explain the present situation.

It is at once clear that the worker will not only have to help the family develop a plan for its activity, but she will also need to develop a very definite plan for her work with the family. The worker's immediate objectives and plans will in many cases be different from those of the family, although the ultimate goal will probably be the same. For example, the \$_____ family want to increase their income so that they can be self-supporting and have a reasonable degree of security. They examine their past year's expenditures and find they have been spending a very large portion of their income for food. They decide after some calculation and weighing of values, that by producing, preserving and storing more garden produce, meat and eggs, they can reduce this expenditure an appreciable amount. Their activity plan for the first year is to grow a bigger and better garden, preserve and store more vegetables, produce, butcher, preserve and store their own meat supply and increase the poultry flock. They also decide to adopt methods of production which will insure maximum output at minimum cost.

The worker will, of course, base her plan of work with this family on this same activity. Her plan, however, will include a schedule of activities which will be directed toward the acquisition of necessary subject matter and the development of skills, abilities and attitudes on the part of the family members which will make it possible for the family to carry on after the worker's assistance is no longer available. She will plan to bring to the family such stimuli, information and methods of procedure as will result not only in an "ever normal cellar" and increased income but also in the members knowing how to:

1. Make an all year round well balanced food plan
2. Insure a better garden
3. Safely preserve food
4. Improve storage facilities
5. Keep a record of food stored as a basis for next year's plan.
6. Evaluate the stored food from a monetary and nutritive point of view
7. Induce the children to eat and enjoy a well balanced diet.

The home economist's plan will also include a time schedule showing the seasons at which certain activities will be carried on and methods she will use for accomplishing each. It will include a statement of the results she expects to obtain by the end of a year and the number of contacts she expects will be necessary to accomplish these results.

Before beginning the development of a home management plan, it is essential that both the worker and the family understand the situation which brought them together and the responsibilities which each is to assume in the relationship which is to follow. The worker who immediately launches into a series of what to the family seem impertinent and prying questions, without having explained why such information is essential to her work with the family, and the way in which it is to be used, has failed almost at once in the "stage setting" step. The development of understanding and cooperation should be one of the objectives of the first visit -- even though they cannot always be obtained in so short a time. A longer period spent in simple and sane explanation and less in questioning on a first visit may be well repaid in the long run.

It is desirable that the husband, wife and older children participate in the building of the plan for it is extremely important that they consider it their plan and a plan which they can and will follow. It is desirable that it be a written plan. The skillful worker knows how to get the necessary information, how to record it, how to quickly evaluate the family's needs and resources and bring them together to make a satisfactory whole. She has at her command necessary short-cut devices and work sheets.

The value of such a plan lies not entirely in the plan itself but in the by-products resulting from the process of developing the plan; -- the

attitudes, interests and fields of thought opened up. Such information about families' habits, abilities, experiences and cooperation, can be obtained by the worker at this time that she might be months in obtaining otherwise. Much of her success depends upon the skill with which she asks questions, her ability to use answers and her ability to instill confidence. A whole-hearted interest and a genuine desire to help is essential if the plan building step is to be a success.

A family wishing to become adjusted or readjusted to the economic and social problems confronting them must have the will to do so. Many times it is up to the worker to develop that "will to achieve" and help the family to see possibilities ahead. Years of frustrated efforts take their toll in terms of reduced ambition and sometimes even lost hope. On the other hand, most families desire something. It may be increased income, security, a car, a good herd, a better house, land ownership, ability to provide their growing family with the necessities of life or improved health. It is desirable that the worker find this desire and if it seems worthy to build to it -- if it is not worthy (in light of family's need, not in light of the worker's ideas) then it will become necessary to help the family to change its goal -- this may be a long-time objective in the mind of the worker -- and it must be within the limits of possibility.

If the contact with the family is one which is brought about through a social problem, its explanation or solution may be found in the economic situation and vice versa. Social and economic problems of the rural family are closely interwoven for life is lived as a whole, not in strips, and while we seemingly work with one problem at a time, we must be able to see the implications of all forms and give consideration to each as it affects the individual situation. It is important that the worker be able to distinguish between cause and effect in order to map out an intelligent plan for procedure.

Development of the ability to analyze each situation and to decide where to begin is one of the worker's most difficult and most important tasks. To solve all problems at once is impossible. One thing is certain, she must begin where the family now is and must build upon the abilities and resources which she finds. One small pertinent successful accomplishment will initiate many more which will lead in the end to greater accomplishments.

Two common problems not in work with low-income farm families have to do with food and housing. What information and abilities must the worker possess in planning with the family for the solution of the problem of inadequate food or poor nutrition? One of the first things she must do is to determine the specific family's food needs, which means she must be able to plan for the infant, the growing child, the aged grandfather and the family member who is under the doctor's care and on a special diet. She must be able to translate these food needs into terms which the family can understand. She must know what cash income is available for living needs and she must know what the farm is producing or capable of producing for home use. Her knowledge of food values, cost of food on the market and cost of production of home

produced foods must be such that she can quickly and intelligently substitute in order to answer such questions as these: If there is a lack of meats, what amount of eggs can be used for what amount of meat? If there are more dried beans and less meat available, what substitution can be made? Under what conditions is it wiser: to purchase milk than to produce it; to buy eggs than to produce them; to buy canned tomatoes, buy tomatoes and can them or to grow and can them?

Where the total income available for family living is low and uncertain, it may be necessary to do something about increasing the size of the herd, the cultivated acreage, or even moving to another farm. The solution of the problem may involve the development of a different type of enterprise which will insure a more regular source of income. This in turn may mean the borrowing of money from some loan agency which brings new responsibilities and obligations to the family.

The knowledge that the consumption of three or four cups of milk a day and three or four eggs a week, is a habit which is conducive to good nutrition is of little value when the family sells all the milk to meet the necessary operating expense, or to meet the demands of an insistent loan agency, or when the family is unable, because of lack of feed or information on feed and care, to induce the hens to lay enough eggs for the family's needs. Thus, what started out to be a very simple problem can easily involve many more phases of "family planning" than can be anticipated when thinking of the problem in the classroom.

Housing and equipment problems are frequently difficult to solve and call for considerable courage and far sightedness on the part of the worker. Lack of adequate sleeping space and equipment, lack of screens, fire hazards, lack of storage space, lack of pure water and a poorly kept and equipped house, are but a few of the problems frequently met. Such conditions may be the result of low income, lack of training and initiative, poor land, poor tenant-landlord relationship, poor leases and many other conditions.

Assume a situation where the house is inadequate in sleeping and storage space, lacks screens and shows evidence of poor housekeeping. The worker will want to know the cause for such a condition before she is able to help create a situation where the family is no longer content to live in too few rooms and unsanitary and untidy surroundings and is challenged to change its environment.

She will need to learn something of the family's income and if they are renters, something of the terms of their lease and their relationship with the landlord. She will want to know something of the early home life, the health of the family, their educational opportunities, their recent disappointments and their philosophy of living.

The solution of the problem may necessitate a plan for increasing income so that cleaning materials, paint, oilcloth and necessary equipment can be purchased. It may be a situation where the standards of the children can be challenged and changed through vocational classes in school or by their

participation in a 4-H Club project. Perhaps the homemaker has lacked the stimulus which comes from the association with other homemakers and her attendance at community meetings or joining a homemaker's group should be encouraged. It may be necessary to contact the landlord to see what can be done about improvement of the buildings, provision of screens, etc., thus, providing an opportunity to explain to both the tenant and the landlord the mutual benefits to be derived where each does his part in keeping the buildings and surroundings in good repair. These are but a few of the probable points of contact.

The solution of such a problem provides an opportunity to apply information and abilities acquired in courses of psychology, family relationship, community relationship, family economics, housing and home management. It is a far more extensive problem than can be solved by handing out a list of directions on how to keep the house clean or by advising the family concerning the number of sleeping rooms a family of seven should have. It implies the application of judgment of the most practical type - and it is likely that it cannot be solved in a day - a month or perhaps even a year!

Each phase of the family living budget with its attendant problem presents a specific situation which involves an analysis of the family need, the wise use of available resources that will need to be planned for, the substitutes and outside contacts that must be made if the family is to be aided in its climb toward the goal of self-support. The extent to which a worker will need to visit any given family varies from the family to which but one or two visits a year is sufficient to the one which will need at least a monthly visit.

Keeping a running record of contact with the family, the accomplishments and future plans, is essential. At reasonable intervals the home economist should measure the family's progress in terms of changed practices, attitudes, position in community, improved family relationships, increased income and net worth, improved food and other living items. In order to do this, devices such as inventories, account books, progress sheets and the like are used. At the end of the year the family council should be again called into session, the year's plan and accomplishments reviewed and evaluated and the next year's plan developed -- this time, it is hoped with much less help from the worker. If the evidences of material progress, improved health, environment and morale are in line with the goal set and if the family has learned to plan for itself, the worker can feel she has succeeded in the first year's program. In any event, she too should evaluate her own accomplishment - make a new plan and start out on the next step.

Summarizing the job of the worker as discussed, it would seem that the home economist who is planning to work with low-income farm families, needs to know how to apply subject matter obtained in psychology, economics and sociology and technical subject matter courses, to every day problems. She should know how to translate technical terminology into understandable words and phrases and she should be able to distinguish between the important and unimportant -- above all, she must be able to start with each family where she finds it and build her program in light of the family's needs, abilities and resources.

